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The Rt. Rev. Dr. George Portman (afterwards) Lord Bishop of Lincoln,
& afterwards of Winchester, the well known author of many valuable works.

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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PAUL,
L O N D O N,

BEFORE
H I S M A J E S T Y,
AND BOTH
H O U S E S O F P A R L I A M E N T,
ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19th, 1797;

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A
GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

Puttyman's
By GEORGE, LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

K Puttyman after Tomlins
Published by His Majesty's Special Command.

L O N D O N:

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M.DCC.XCVIII.

[Price One Shilling.]

3 E 2 M O N

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF SALISBURY

LEADEN

W 1 2 M A L E T X

AND JOHN

HOTELS OF THE

OF TOWN OF SALISBURY

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“ Mercurii, 20^o die Decembris, 1797.

“ ORDERED,

“ THAT the Thanks of this House be given
“ to the LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN, for the
“ excellent Sermon by him preached before
“ His MAJESTY and both HOUSES OF PAR-
“ LIAMENT, at St. Paul's Church, Yesterday,
“ the Day of Public Thanksgiving appointed
“ by His MAJESTY; and that Mr. RYDER
“ and Mr. BURDON do attend his Lordship
“ with the Thanks of this House.

“ J. LEY,

“ Cl. D. Dom. Com.”

2 SAM. c. xxii. v. 1, 2, and part of 3.

AND DAVID SPAKE UNTO THE LORD THE WORDS
OF THIS SONG, IN THE DAY THAT THE LORD
HAD DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THE HAND OF
ALL HIS ENEMIES, AND OUT OF THE HAND OF
SAUL: AND HE SAID, THE LORD IS MY ROCK
AND MY FORTRESS, AND MY DELIVERER: THE
GOD OF MY ROCK, IN HIM WILL I TRUST.

THERE is no article of Religion in which man-
kind is more interested than in the doctrine of
the providence of God, superintending the works of his
hands, and directing the agency with which he invested
them to the gracious purposes of his will. A firm be-
lief that the various occurrences of human life, the

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actions

actions of men, and the operations of matter, are alike subject to the government of an all-wise and benevolent Being, administers hope and consolation under the pressure of every species of adversity, and teaches us in prosperity to acknowledge our Heavenly Father as the Author of all good.

This doctrine stands revealed in Scripture in the plainest and most unequivocal terms. All things are there represented as under the immediate direction of Divine Providence, not “slumbering or sleeping*,” but acting equally at all times and in all places, and embracing the whole race of mankind, and all the works of creation, with the same universal and incessant care. “The hairs of our head are all numbered;” and “a sparrow falls not to the ground†” without the permission of God. The most turbulent elements of the material world, and the most unruly passions of men, equally obey the will of their great Creator: “He stilleth the raging of the sea, and the madness of the people‡.” Nothing is so inconsiderable as to

* Psalm cxxi. 4.

† Matt. x. 29 and 30.

‡ Psalm lxxv. 7.

escape his knowledge; nothing so great as to surpass his power.

But though the controlling influence of the Almighty extends over the whole and every part of the universe, yet kingdoms and nations most signally display his constant government, and are to be considered as the more peculiar objects of his providential care. If he watches over the concerns of individuals with paternal regard, how much more worthy of his superintendence are the affairs of those larger communities, in which not only the interests of thousands, but the happiness or misery of the best and most faithful of his servants, must necessarily be involved! The truth of this position is abundantly illustrated and confirmed in the Books of the Old Testament. The history of the Jews is a continued series of Divine interpositions; and we find them alternately suffering predicted calamities, or enjoying promised blessings, according to the measure of their obedience or disobedience to the commands of God. The counsels of the Almighty with respect to kingdoms may be more manifest in the case of his chosen people, than in that of any other nation; but "with God

“ there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning * ;”
the ways of Providence are uniform and unalterable ;
and the same principles of wisdom, mercy, and justice
which governed the Jews, ever did, and ever will, go-
vern all the nations of the world.

The rise and fall of empires, and the various changes
in the different kingdoms of the earth, which history
records, exhibit to the pious and reflecting mind conti-
nual proofs of the over-ruling power of God. But
there never was a period when the hand of God was
more apparent than in the age in which we live ; nor
was the gracious interposition of Providence ever more
manifest than in the present situation of this kingdom,
when compared with that of the neighbouring na-
tions.

The events of these times, wonderful and inexplicable
as they seem to superficial observers, will be found,
upon inquiry into the sure though mysterious word of
prophecy, to have been ordained in the counsels of
the Sovereign Arbiter of the Universe, and ultimately

* James, i. 17.

to tend to the accomplishment of the great plan of his Providence.

That the Scriptures contain predictions of the principal revolutions and most remarkable occurrences which were to take place in the Christian Church, from the days of the Apostles to the final consummation of all things, is a point generally allowed, although commentators are by no means agreed in the interpretation of those passages which relate to future periods. Nor indeed is it consistent with the nature and design of prophecy, that it should be certainly and precisely understood before its fulfilment. But let us remember that blame is always imputed to those who neglect to take advantage of the light afforded them ; and that we are commanded to “ watch the signs of the times, that we “ may avoid the evils of the latter days *.” By comparing events with their predictions, as the hand of Time withdraws the veil, we learn to admire the wisdom and consistency of the Divine government of the world, and to acknowledge its invariable tendency, whether by blessings or by punishments, by correction, protection, or

* Matt. xvi. 3. 2 Peter, ii. 2 Tim. iii.

destruction, to promote true religion and universal happiness.

It would be impossible on this occasion to enter into an examination of the numerous predictions in the Old and New Testament, which refer to these "latter days;" and therefore I shall barely observe, that it is perfectly consistent with the sentiments of those learned men, who have devoted their attention to the study of prophecy, that the conclusion of the present century should be the commencement of a period of considerable danger to the faith of real Christians, and of great calamity and distress among the nations professing the doctrines, and involved in the consequent vices, of Anti-Christian Rome. And it was the opinion of the illustrious Sir Isaac Newton, who was equally distinguished for comprehensive thought, acuteness of investigation, and humble piety, that "the tyranny of Popish superstition must be put a stop to and broken in pieces by the temporary prevalence of infidelity, before the reign of primitive Christianity should be extended over the world*."

* Whiston on the Revelations, 2d edit. p. 321.

The Conspiracy lately formed and systematically carried on for the utter extirpation of the Christian religion *, the rapid propagation of atheistical principles, the extraordinary sufferings of those countries which were formerly the most zealous supporters of the Papal power, and the trials and dangers to which other Christian nations are exposed, lead us to believe, that the prophecies, from which these inferences are drawn, are now receiving their accomplishment. We may therefore be justified in considering the present power of France as the appointed instrument of punishment to the corrupt part of the Christian world, and of discipline and trial to those who hold "the faith which was once delivered "unto the Saints †;" and this is the only principle upon which we can account for the astonishing success which has attended their arms, and for the adoption of their opinions, in a greater or less degree, in most of the countries of Europe. The long pre-eminence of the

* Vide *Memoires pour servir à l'Histoire du Jacobinisme*, par M. l'Abbé Barruel; and Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe*, carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free-Masons, Illuminati, &c.

† Jude, iii.

French nation in every species of vice and irreligion, fitted them but too well for this tremendous office ; and it has been wisely ordered, that in executing the vengeance of Heaven, they should themselves suffer torments greater than those which they inflict upon others : To use the strong expression of the Psalmist, “ Their swords have “ entered into their own hearts *.”

From obvious causes, the cruelty, the tyranny, and the impiety of the Church of Rome have almost faded from our memory ; but we must bring them back to our recollection, if we would understand “ the judgments of “ God which are abroad in the earth †.” She is now persecuted in her turn. As Englishmen we forget her injuries ; as Christians we pity and give alms to her exiled adherents, regardless of the malicious endeavours of our adversaries to represent the Church of England as itself interested in her preservation. But let us only advert to the principles, religious and civil, upon which we separated from that idolatrous and intolerant power ; and it will be evident that, as a national church, we can have neither part nor lot in this matter. Our causes are

* Psalm xxxvii. 15.

† Isaiah, xxvi. 9.

distinct,

distinct, and must ever remain so; and we have now more abundant reason than ever to rejoice in our Reformed Religion. Our fathers obeyed the warning voice*, and left her corrupt communion when she had risen to the zenith of her glory; and we have hitherto escaped the plagues by which she is now tormented.

And let it not pass unobserved, that of all the countries in which the Protestant faith is established upon the Continent of Europe, only one has been allowed to fall a victim to the desolating pest which walks the earth. Was she conquered by the sword of France? No.—Tainted by the deadly poison of her principles, she deserted the faith for which her ancestors had contended with such glorious success against the arms of Papal tyranny; betrayed the friend who had nourished her in infancy, supported her in danger, and with the blessing of God might still have saved her; and basely sacrificed religion, honor, and independence, to the delusive hope

* “ And I heard another voice from Heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” Rev. xviii. 4.

of protection for her wealth and trade from Atheistic despotism. And what has been the fate of this apostate nation? Is she not enslaved by the power with whom she fought alliance? Has she not been deprived of the sources of her riches and her commerce, by the people whom she treacherously deserted? Has not one of her fleets been taken as it were in a net, and another been completely vanquished upon her own coast; and both, by that very nation whose maritime force she vainly hoped, by the aid of France, to crush? But, as if to mark the purpose and the limits of the oppressor's power, that Protestant land, "for the sake of the remnant that dwell therein," has not been made the seat of war; nor have her sufferings been equal in degree or kind to those of any Popish country which has submitted to the yoke of France.

When we consider the activity and artifice with which the Agents of Evil have disseminated their noxious principles, and look at the present state of England, how can we avoid concluding, that there must be some inherent qualities in the Establishments of this kingdom in Church and State, which check the growing mischief,

mischiefs, and raise the virtues and the glory of this nation above the rest of Europe? The noble fabric of our Constitution was built up, as it were, within the precincts of our Altar. The antient foundations were gradually cleared, as the light of the Reformation increased; and this fortress of our liberties and happiness was erected by the temperate measures and skilful labours of men deeply sensible of the inestimable value of the Gospel of Righteousness, as it relates to "this world as well as to that which is to come*." And to the general diffusion of religious knowledge which their wisdom and piety secured to us by law, are we indebted for all our present blessings. Where will be found such strict adherence to public faith; such impartial administration of justice; such fidelity in the concerns of private life; such liberal attention to the poor; such kindness to the stranger; such generosity to the prisoner? The wise and understanding people of this great nation, knowing and feeling the value of those inseparable blessings genuine liberty and true religion, disdainfully reject the insidious attempts to bewilder their reason, inflame

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

their passions, and rob them of their happiness; and upon every emergency the bulk of all descriptions of men have displayed a zeal, a loyalty, and a patriotism truly characteristic of the British nation. While our enemies have insulted the Majesty of Heaven, we have humbled ourselves before our God, and acknowledged our transgressions. While they have impiously denied his all-controlling power, we have prayed unto the Lord to give wisdom to our councils, success to our arms, and steadiness to our people. And he has heard us. The gracious interposition of his Providence has been apparent in saving us from open and from secret enemies, —from famine— from invasion— from insurrection— from treason. Our conquests are extensive; our commerce flourishing; our land in peace; the courage, magnanimity, and discipline of our Army have been most eminently conspicuous; and our Fleets have been triumphant beyond the boast of former times. The Banners, which you have this day seen presented at the altar of this Cathedral Church of the Metropolis, as the most public testimony of devout and humble gratitude to the Supreme Disposer of all events, are not the trophies of a single victory over one enemy,

but of a series of victories, equally brilliant and important, over the three nations of Europe most distinguished for their maritime power. The commanders of our fleets have displayed an unexampled degree of zeal, promptitude, and skill; and our seamen have fought with a spirit and intrepidity which we should in vain seek even in the annals of this country. Our naval strength, raised to a height unknown at any former period, not only exceeds that of every rival neighbour, but has compelled each in its turn to submit to our superiority; and has reduced them all to the degraded state of seeing a victorious fleet of England bidding them defiance in the very mouths of their harbours. But History shall celebrate the glory of our Navy, and the splendor of these achievements; and while she transmits to the admiration of distant ages the professional merit of our commanders, I trust she will not fail to record the distinguished piety of one of our heroes, not only as adding lustre to his other virtues, but as an useful lesson to all posterity.

The value of these victories will appear inestimable, if we reflect upon the allowed importance
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of our naval force to the prosperity of these kingdoms, and upon the nature of the contest in which we are engaged. We are not contending for the ordinary objects of worldly ambition. The points now at issue are, whether we shall continue "to sit under our own vine*", and eat our bread with cheerfulness;" whether we shall preserve ourselves an independent and a Christian kingdom; whether we shall any longer enjoy the protection of laws, or the comforts of religion; whether our posterity shall inherit the constitution which we received from our fathers, and whether our sons and our daughters shall stand up after us in the congregation of the Lord. May this nation, now solemnly assembled by the piety of our Sovereign to give glory and thanksgiving to God for these signal and repeated instances of his mercy, unite, as the heart of one man, in repentance for past transgressions, and supplication for future aid and protection! May we here, in the house of our God, deliberately resolve to be "steadfast in the faith," which is truly "the hope of our salvation;" to bear with

* Micah, iv. 4.

fortitude our portion of the general distress produced by the general iniquity of the times; to be firm, vigilant, and persevering in the defence of our religion, our king, and our country; and ever to hold it as a sacred duty to transmit inviolate to our children the civil and religious rights which our ancestors so gloriously obtained!

As England was formerly the bulwark of the Protestant faith, so now must she be the bulwark of Christianity itself. The horrible conspiracy to exterminate the Christian religion, first projected by the man whose Apotheosis was publicly celebrated with enthusiastic rapture in the capital of France, declares, beyond the possibility of doubt, the nature of the warfare to which we are summoned. But the discovery and display of this conspiracy at this eventful period of the world are surely designed to establish the faith of real Christians, and confirm their trust in the promises of God. They will see in this atrocious attempt the most accurate fulfilment of prophecy; and their confidence that "the gates of hell shall not
"prevail

“prevail against the church of Christ*,” will be strengthened by this testimony to the truth of the sacred writings. It may also be graciously designed to increase the number of true believers from among that class of men who look not beyond the present world, but who are anxious to promote virtue, peace, good order, and happiness among mankind. The view of existing circumstances, presented thus clearly to their eyes, may lead them to a more serious inquiry into the origin of a religion allowed by its enemies to be the most effectual barrier against vice, anarchy, confusion, and misery; or at least its acknowledged importance to the safety of the state may secure them in its strenuous defence.

On many occasions have the inhabitants of these kingdoms stood forth in support of the established religion at the expence of the blood and treasure of the nation. Let not the present age be disgraced by feeling less zeal, when the contest is between Christians and Infidels, than our fathers felt, when the contest

* Matt. xvi. 18.

was between Protestants and Papists. Often have they resisted the encroachments of a haughty rival upon their dominions, power, and wealth: but we are now called to strive with enemies who have avowed, even in the public acts of their government, the most rancorous hatred against this kingdom, and a fixed determination to employ their concentrated force to overthrow our laws, our liberties, and our religion. The subversion of the established government of every country in which they have erected their standard; the faithlessness and treachery with which they have acted towards every people with whom they have pretended to make alliance, the systematic plunder of every order in society; the intolerant persecution of every opinion, custom, or usage inimical to their views, and the diffusion of principles destructive of the eternal as well as temporal interests of mankind, must surely convince us from facts which cannot be controverted, that this war is, both in the objects for which we are contending, and in the character of our enemy, fundamentally different from any other in which we were ever engaged. And shall we doubt the issue of the contest in such a cause, and with such

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enemies?

enemies? "The Lord himself will be on our side,
 "and we need not fear what man can do unto us*,
 "for he will deliver his people from the blasphemers
 "of his holy name." The dazzling splendor of their
 conquests cannot deceive us, who see the awful pur-
 port of their commission, into a belief of their real
 prosperity. The objects as well as the instruments
 of punishment, they are at this moment a prey to
 tyranny, plunder, profligacy, and atheism; and while
 the delusive sounds, Fraternity, Liberty, and Equality,
 are echoed through the land, every social tie is broken;
 the chains with which they mean to enslave the
 world are rivetted upon themselves, and unprecedented
 misery pervades the mighty mass formed by promif-
 cuous ruins.

But, though the superior purity of our established
 religion, and the comparative excellence of our national
 character, may inspire us with a confident hope that
 we shall not participate in all the miseries of the cup
 of retribution, now pouring out upon the corrupted
 church of Christ; yet let it ever be remembered that

* Psalm cxviii. 6.

God requires his servants to put forth all their strength in defence of the blessings which, through his bounty, they enjoy. The prescience of God and the free-agency of man are indeed incomprehensible by our finite understanding; but the irreversible decrees of God, and the necessity of human exertion, are, in the divine government of the world, perfectly compatible. Promised blessings are declared to be certain, although accompanied with conditions which appear to be contingent; and the voluntary actions of men, as being foreseen by the Almighty, are represented as the ground and cause of his future assistance, and as essential to the accomplishment of events which he has ordained to take place.

The inspired apostle St. Paul, in his voyage to Rome, was authorized to declare, when the ship appeared to be sinking in a storm, that none of the crew should perish. But when some of the men were pusillanimously endeavouring to desert the vessel, he added, "Except these men abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved*:" that is, their preservation depended upon

* Acts, xxvii. 31.

every man's standing to his post and doing his duty. In like manner, we are now tossed by a tempestuous wind, and the waves beat violently against us; but we have ground for trusting that we shall get safely into port, if we be not wanting to ourselves. "Abide in the ship;" stand firm to your duty; and then, "Fear not, for ye shall see the salvation of God *." "Fear not; but serve the Lord with all your heart, for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth; for consider how great things he hath done for you, and that he hath not dealt so with any other nation †."

We must not however vainly presume that we shall escape all chastisement in this predicted day of vengeance and purification, though "we are not as many who corrupt the word of God ‡." Hitherto we seem to have been graciously "chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world §:" but who shall say to what extent correction may become

* Exod. xiv. 13.

‡ 2 Cor. ii. 17.

† 1 Sam. xii. 20—25.

§ 1 Cor. xi. 32.

necessary,

necessary, if we neglect to hear the awful threatenings of the Lord, and “to adorn,” by the purity of our lives and conversation, “the doctrine we profess*?” “Behold his arm is lifted up in judgment, and all the nations of the earth must fear before him: for He is like a refiner’s fire †.” Many are the virtues which distinguish this nation, but our sins are also many and grievous. Surely the extraordinary events of these times must awaken in men a sense of religion: recollection of mercies received; prospect of impending evils; examples of suffering nations all around us; every thing which can interest or animate the human mind, concur to rouse our latent piety, and to banish that disregard to the sacred ordinances of our religion, and that languid indifference respecting the principles and duties of Christianity, which are the most formidable signs of danger to this country.

Let us then sanctify this day of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Benefactor, by solemn vows of future zeal in his service, of future obedience to his will! Let every

* Titus, ii. 10.

† Mal. iii. 2.

inhabitant of these kingdoms, whatever may be his rank or condition, reflect, that as he has a share in the benefits of these victories, so he has an obligation of gratitude imposed upon him; that a faithful discharge of that debt can alone give a claim to the future protection of Heaven; and that by reforming himself, he may perhaps complete "that number of the righteous, for whose sake the city shall be saved*." Let us ever bear in mind the necessary connexion between national virtue and national prosperity, which reason and experience alike assert; and which is set before us by infallible authority in the circumstantial history of the people of Israel. God never failed to hear their prayers, and to rescue them from their oppressors, when they repented of their sins, and "walked as obedient children." But when they rebelled against him, neither did he fail to deliver them again into the hands of the spoilers. They were often punished in mercy; but these mild and temporary corrections produced not a lasting effect; and the final consequence of their continuing in sin, and shutting their eyes against the light

* Gen. xviii. 24.

vouchsafed them, was, their being surrendered up into the power of a cruel and implacable enemy, who utterly destroyed their civil and religious polity. The present situation of this country resembles that of the Jews, immediately after they had experienced one of those many signal interpositions of Divine favour. God grant the comparison may end here, and that we may be found of the “ number that was sealed before the “ day of vengeance ;” and “ be able, having done all, “ to stand before the Son of Man * !”

May God for ever preserve among us the true light of the Gospel, that “ Vineyard which his own right “ hand hath planted †,” that original source of all our various enjoyments, that ground of all our hopes of future blessings ! May He establish for ever our invaluable constitution in church and state, the tried security of civil and religious freedom ! May He long preserve our exemplary King to a faithful and united people ; and inspire all ranks of men with wisdom to understand, and firmness to maintain, the great

* Rev. vi. and vii. Eph. vi. 13.

† Psalm lxxx. 15.

cause in which we are engaged! May He continue to go forth with our fleets and our armies; and may He, in his own good time, turn the hearts of our enemies, and give us the blessing of an honorable, secure, and permanent peace!

THE END.
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